



# GILA RIVER TELECOMMUNICATIONS, INC.

"Proudly serving the Gila River Indian Community."

October 15, 1997

RECEIVED

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Mr. William F. Caton, Secretary  
1919 M Street, N.W., Room 222  
Federal Communications Commission  
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: CC Docket 96-45  
Federal-State Joint Board on Universal  
Service: Established of Rural Task Force

Dear Mr. Caton:

In accordance with the Commission's Public Notice of September 17, 1997, The National Tribal Telephone Association (NTTA) nominates Mr. J. D. Williams of Eagle Butte, South Dakota to one of the Category 7 positions on the Rural Task Force. A detailed biography of Mr. Williams is attached.

The NTTA was organized in March of 1997 by five tribally owned and operated telephone companies and two tribal telephone entities in development. The purpose of the organization is to provide a forum for tribally controlled telephone companies to share business growth opportunities and discuss effects of regulatory and industry changes on tribal telephone companies. Mr. Williams is a co-chair of NTTA.

NTTA believes Mr. Williams is highly and uniquely qualified to represent the concerns of Native Americans on the Rural Task Force. The challenge of extending universal service to Native American communities is among the most difficult facing the Joint Board and the Commission. Mr. Williams' extensive knowledge of both the economic and social issues facing Native American communities complements his substantial experience with the technical and economic requirements for providing rural areas with high quality modern telecommunications meeting the requirements of the Commission's Universal service rules.

Sincerely,

Robert N. Porter  
Co-chairman  
National Tribal Telephone Association

Enclosures

cc: Astrid Carlson  
CC Docket 96-45 Joint Board Service List

Box 5015, 7065 W. Allison Drive, Chandler, Arizona 85226-5135, (520) 796-3333 / fax (520) 796-7534

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**Rural Task Force  
Professional Qualifications for Nominee**

<b>Nominee:</b>	<b>J. D Williams</b> General Manager
<b>Contact Information:</b>	Cheyenne River Sioux Telephone Authority (CRST) 100 Main Street Eagle Butte, SD 57625  Phone: (605) 964-2600 Fax: (605) 964-1000
<b>Employment History:</b>	1981 - 1982 Fiscal Systems Officer CRST Telephone Authority 1982 - 1985 Management Assistant CRST Telephone Authority 1985 - Present General Manager CRST Telephone Authority
<b>Nominee Category:</b>	Other non ILEC participants (other appropriate representatives, including those representing the concerns of Native Americans)
<b>Professional Qualifications:</b>	Bachelor of Science/Business Administration in 1979 from Black Hills State College Sixteen years' experience in the telecommunications industry Twelve years as General Manager of a rural Tribally owned telephone company
<b>Regulatory Experience:</b>	In his present position as General Manager, Mr. Williams has been responsible for regulatory work of C.R.S.T Telephone Authority, an Indian-Owned Telecommunications Company, that does not fall under the authority of the state of South Dakota's regulatory authority. Mr Williams has been instrumental in developing company tariffs and coordinating regulatory issues based on tribal sovereignty concepts which is unique in the regulatory arena. His company, C.R.S.T. Telephone Authority was the only Indian- Owned Telco in the United States until the 1990's when another four Indian-Owned Telco Organizations were founded.
<b>Background - Engineering</b>	Mr Williams' responsibility as General Manager requires a strong knowledge base in basic telecommunications network operations. Over the course of time, Mr. Williams has acquired continued education and hands on field application through various seminars and actual involvement with field situations. His telco covers a 4,600 square mile area and with just over one subscriber per mile of plant presents significant engineering challenges.

**Representation  
of a variety of  
economic and  
social interests:**

Mr. Williams has a long history of working as a manager for this unique company located in rural America which serves predominately Indian country. His involvement with the South Dakota Telecommunication Association and other local organizations has provided a well, rounded knowledge base for understanding the challenges of rural companies. His company serves an area that has a agriculture based economy.

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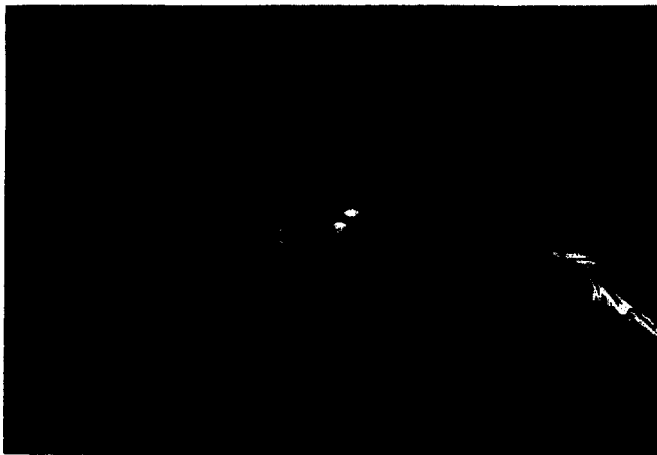
# A Prophecy Fulfilled: Building the Lakota Community

BY JIM FELTER

I've always heard that South Dakota is one of America's best-kept secrets. Now that I've been there, I know it's true.

The realization came to me en route to Eagle Butte, South Dakota to cover the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe (CRST) Telephone Authority's involvement in a 1994 Jimmy Carter Work Project, sponsored by Habitat for Humanity International. Habitat for Humanity is a non-profit, Christian housing organization dedicated to eliminating substandard housing worldwide. CRST was the first Indian reservation Habitat selected for a week-long building blitz. A blitz is house-raising party on a grand scale — in a single week, Habitat volunteers build 30 houses from start to finish for qualified families.

I traveled to Eagle Butte in late July to shoot the story for the fall edition of *NTCA's Video Connection* video magazine. The story promised to be a video producer's dream: one filled with human interest and support from the local telephone cooperative, with former President Jimmy Carter playing a leading role.



*Jim Felter is NTCA's audiovisual producer.*



*Former President and Habitat for Humanity Volunteer Jimmy Carter*

It turned out to be all of that and more. My assistant and I would spend the next several weeks camping on a bluff overlooking the Cheyenne River; all the motels within 90 miles of Eagle Butte were filled to capacity, booked months in advance to accommodate the influx of media and volunteers arriving for the Habitat project. Sleeping outdoors, I soon began to realize why the local people feel so connected to their land.

The reservation, or "rez" as it is commonly called by its 9,000 Lakota-Sioux inhabitants, covers 46,000 square miles of beautiful rolling hills and endless plains. Sunrises and sunsets flood the open sky in brilliant hues of reds, pinks, and amber. Coyotes greet the dusk, howling at the rising moon as they embark on their nightly hunt. And like the song says, the deer and antelope play.

Located in central South Dakota, Eagle Butte is the tribal headquarters for the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Reservation. When we got into town, Eagle Butte was bustling, in part because of the onslaught of Habitat vol-

unteers, but also because it has become the economic center of the area. Builders were working on the new Super 8 motel being constructed on the highway leading into town, next to the Cultural Center and Pow-Wow grounds. On Main Street, employees were preparing for the grand opening of the new 17,000-square-foot supermarket. The town was energized.

Appropriately, CRST Telephone Authority's offices are in the center of town. General Manager J.D. Williams explained how CRST Telephone Authority was directly involved in the Habitat Project: It donated more than \$100,000 worth of outside plant and construction time for the new homes; set temporary phone and fax lines for the media and Habitat volunteers; and helped with the construction. Every employee and board member would volunteer for at least a day to help build the homes.

What I quickly learned was that the Habitat project was just one facet



*CRST Telephone Authority donated generously — in telephone plant and volunteer labor — to the home-building blitz.*

of the Telephone Authority's involvement in community development. According to Williams, CRST Telephone Authority and its related businesses provide employment for 55 people, and "99 percent of them come from the local community." Thus, "the up and coming youth have an opportunity to stay in the community, and I guess that's what rural development is all about."

Williams is a dynamic force, the type of manager who is always on the go. In the first few minutes of our meeting it became obvious he had his finger on the pulse of the community. It was going to take a lot of physical and mental energy to keep up with him.

### **In the Beginning**

CRST Telephone Authority was formed with a Rural Electrification Administration (REA) loan in 1977.

Williams said that up until then he had never had a phone, and there were only a few multiparty lines serving the entire reservation. Today the Telephone Authority owns five exchanges, all with digital switching, and has the fiber in place to provide distance learning and make sure the reservation will be ready for the information superhighway.

These accomplishments in and of themselves are something to be proud of, but the Telephone Authority has also been able to diversify and become a business leader, spearheading local economic development ventures. Says Williams, "There is skepticism about Indian people running their own businesses. We've had our failures, but I think that CRST Telephone Authority and the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe are involved in a very dynamic process. I think we're proving the skeptics wrong."

After divestiture in 1984, the Telephone Authority board decided it needed to diversify to stay alive in a newly competitive environment. The board formed CRST Telephone Sales and Service, creating four new full-time positions and one part-time position, bringing its staff up to 21.

Mark Van Norman, the tribal attorney, says, "I think the Telephone



*With all volunteer labor, Habitat for Humanity built 30 homes in Eagle Butte in one week.*

Authority has a strong corporate structure in terms of having an independent board. Because it is responsive to the market, it has been able to expand and to recognize opportunities and take action to meet those opportunities."

### **Leading the Community Toward Growth**

By 1987 the Telephone Authority had become the business leader on the reservation. The board realized that by diversifying into other areas, it had the ability to create jobs on the reservation. It then purchased the local propane gas retail company and created Cheyenne River Gas — many of the homes on the reservation are heated by propane. The board saw both a community need and business opportunity.

Later that same year, the board decided to buy the local pay television company and set up Cheyenne River Cable TV. The CATV business has grown from several hundred subscribers in two towns to more than 1,000 subscribers in four communities. Today Cheyenne River Cable TV is also offering Direct Broadcast Satellite. All the while, the company worked to create new jobs, keep revenue on the reservation, and improve the quality of life for its people.

### **Keeping Money Where the Mouths Are**

Riding on these successes, the board identified another community need. For years the local grocery store was owned by a private off-reservation supermarket chain. The next closest supermarket was in Pierre, more than 90 miles away, and many of the local people didn't own cars. Unfortunately, the chain took advantage of its monopoly and charged inflated prices. It wasn't uncommon for shoppers to have to pay two dol-



*In July, tribal leaders celebrated the opening of the Lakota ThriftyMart, a full-service grocery owned and operated by the tribe.*

lars for a loaf of bread or a dozen eggs. These high prices hit hard on the economically depressed reservation. In addition, being an off-reservation corporation meant that important dollars were leaving the area.

The CRST Telephone Authority board applied for and received an Indian Community Development Block Grant and set up a grocery marketing corporation called the Lakota ThriftyMart. In July, the opening of a 17,000-square-foot, fully stocked, reasonably priced supermarket gave everyone on the reservation a sense of pride and reason to celebrate. The fact that the ThriftyMart is owned and operated by the tribe means that the flow of money remains on the reservation, food prices are lower, and 35 new jobs are in place.

Says ThriftyMart Manager Bernie La Plante, "I worked for the previous manager, and he had about 20 people employed. We went from that to now employing 35. We took inexperienced workers and gave them the chance to learn the grocery business from the ground up. I think I can speak for all my department heads; they really appreciate the opportunity the board has given them to take on these roles. We look forward to hav-

ing a thriving, successful business."

The grocery marketing corporation has already become a springboard for future endeavors. Plans are being made to open a convenience store and gas station in one of the reservation's most remote communities, Cherry Creek.

The business success of the Telephone Authority is having residual effects in that its entrepreneurial spirit is spreading: Eagle Butte is now the third fastest-growing community in South Dakota, luring outside investors and business interests.

Because of the remoteness of the reservation, these people and other travelers often make overnight trips. The closest motel to Eagle Butte is 40 miles away in Faith — and it's usually full, says Williams. For almost 20 years the tribe has been trying to build a motel on the reservation.

Several years ago when looking into possible economic development projects, the tribe conducted a feasibility study and proved its need for a motel. The tribe presented its findings to the Super 8 Motel headquarters and purchased a \$20,000 franchise license in 1991. With a 90-percent-guaranteed loan from the Small Business Administration, the tribe





*The new Super 8 motel, scheduled to open the end of November, will give tourists and others visiting the Eagle Butte area a convenient place to stay.*

began construction shortly thereafter. The motel will include 40 rooms and a conference center. Construction should be completed by the end of November.

Orville Mestes, director of the Office of Planning and Economic Development for the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, comments, "One of the things that's happened as a result of the successful ventures of the Telephone Authority is management expertise. In this case we are training our own people to become managers. I think that's key to anything. We are going to hire an Indian manager here and have that person trained to manage the hotel. We don't need outside management. We are educated, sophisticated, and everything else. I think we can do it ourselves."

Once the Super 8 motel is complete, the Lakota people plan on drawing on their colorful native culture to attract tourism. These are a people who have a great pride in their heritage and native American traditions. They believe in a duality of existence, a spiritual connection to everything they do. As an outsider, I found it refreshing to hear business leaders speak not only in terms of dollars and the bottom line, but also

as to what each endeavor means to the spiritual health of their community. I believe this is one reason the tribe places an emphasis on community instead of individual profit. An example of this spiritual connection can perhaps best be seen in the tribe's reintroduction of the buffalo on the reservation and the formation of the Buffalo Corporation.

### **A Prophecy Fulfilled**

The buffalo means many things to the Lakota people. From a business standpoint, raising buffalo is more profitable than raising cattle. A buffalo cow sells for around \$1,200, compared with a domestic cow, which sells for around \$750. Buffalo prices tend to stay level, and domestic cattle prices tend to fluctuate. Also, because buffalo are indigenous to the South Dakota plains, they are better suited for the rough winters, can eat the native grasses, and require less care. Health-conscious Americans also are discovering that buffalo meat is naturally leaner than domestic cattle.

The buffalo are also a tourist attraction. As I stood in the middle of the herd that stretched out over the plains, I understood why. The buffalo are an integral part of American

legend and Native American culture. In addition to the economic reasons, the reintroduction of buffalo will enable more of us to see these animals on their native ground and to better understand their place in history, and thus, our own. I found the experience exhilarating.

The tribe's excitement about the reintroduction of buffalo came through in every interview I conducted, but it was much more than just economics or tourism — it was spiritual. Although the Buffalo Corporation represents another economic center for the Lakota people, it also fulfills an ancient prophecy. The buffalo returning to the Lakota people signals the beginning of a time of prosperity, a return to a natural balance that will allow the Lakota to regain their past glory.

It seems less than coincidental that with the help of the REA, Eagle Butte was able to start growing. It would be repetitive to reexamine the role telecommunications plays in economic development, but it can never be stated too strongly the role telephone cooperatives play in community development. CRST Telephone Authority and the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe are a shining example of how government-supported programs, such as REA, can have ripple effects, spawning new businesses, creating new jobs, and strengthening communities from the inside out.

"I think [the REA] is one of the finest organizations that I've ever known," former President Jimmy Carter told me. "REA has a solid foundation with farms, with agricultural families, its historical importance, its ability to bring people together in a democratic organization and let them say what is best for their own community, no matter whether it's recreation or health care or education, or better facilities for people to live or even jobs. I think the REA has a foundation on which good lives can be built for all people."